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SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FIFTH CONFERENCE

Report of the Norden Division

Paper submitted by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**

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Since the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1987 the work carried out by the countries of Norden Division has mainly focussed on the national programs of the national onomastic, cartographic, and geographic institutions of the countries concerned. The reviews and results of the work are discussed in detail in the national reports of the individual countries. Some information from Denmark and Iceland is included in this report.

Nordic and Nordic-Baltic meetings. - Regular contacts of experts on onomastics and linguistics, as well as on cartography, and geography are a tradition within the Nordic countries. Perhaps this is the reason that the Norden Division has had formal meetings only infrequently. Since the 5th U.N. Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1987 the Norden Division has met once, on April 10-11, 1989 in Gävle, Sweden. This meeting was attended by 14 participants from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The items discussed were the following:

1. collaboration to ensure uniformity on maps and charts,
2. problems on the usage of Sámi (Lappish) orthography when computerizing names,
3. the status of the toponymic data bases in the Nordic countries.

The next divisional meeting was held in Helsinki, Finland, on 13 March 1992. It was attended by 22 experts from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, including representatives for Swedish speakers in Finland, the North Sámi people, and Finnish speakers in Norway. The meeting can also be called historical one because one of the new member countries of United Nations, Estonia, sent an observer to it.

The following issues were discussed:

1. the tasks before the Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names,
2. the reduction of conventional names (exonyms),
3. the stability and instability in the usage of the Romanization systems accepted at UN conferences in 1972, 1977, 1987,
4. the status of the geographical names used by the national minorities in Nordic countries,
5. how to improve the implementation of recom mendations of UNGEGN in internal institutions, and,
6. the problems regarding reliable information about name changes and new names in foreign countries.

Resolutions made by the divisional meeting:

1. Since Ms. E. M. Närhi from Finland desired to withdraw from the chairmanship, and the experts from Denmark considered it difficult to assume the position at the time, it was decided that the chairmanship of the Division would rotate to Norway: Mr. B. Helleland will act as the chairman from the beginning of the year 1993.
2. An ad hoc group of experts from each Nordic country was established for discussion of a common policy on how the usage of exonyms (national conventional names) could be reduced in accordance with the recommendations of the UN Conferences (II 28, 29, III 18, 19, IV 20).

A representative from Finland participated as an observer in the meeting arranged by the Estonian Language Office 7-8 May 1992 in Tallinn. The institutions on onomastics and cartography in the Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, were asked by the Estonian Language Office to send their experts to the regional meeting on the standardization and use of geographical names in the Baltic states. This extraordinarily rewarding meeting was intended as a start for working with UNGEGN. Each of three countries expressed strongly their national needs for cooperation on the standardization of geographical names both with other countries and UNGEGN.

Nordic projects. - The Nordic countries are preparing a joint database of names in their area. It is based upon a 1:2 000 000 scale map.

The list of country names in Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish with the corresponding derivatives used to designate their inhabitants is being updated and will be published by the Nordic Language Board in the near future.

National standardization, names authorities, gazetteers in Denmark

Cooperation with Danmarks Statistik (Denmark Statistical Bureau) and Geodætisk Institut (The Geodetic Institute), which, following its amalgamation with Søkortarkivet (the Hydrographic Department) and Matrikeldirektoratet (the Land Registry Office) has changed its name to Kort- og Matrikelstyrelsen (the National Survey and Cadastre), has been intensified since 1987. This increased cooperation means that the names of municipalities and parishes etc. will henceforth appear with uniform spelling in the publications of the Institutes.

The Place-name Committee currently treats matters concerning orthography, alterations in place-names, and authorization of names. The general public takes a great interest in place-names, in particular, the problem of writing the Scandinavian letter å as aa, as well as the difficulties presented by the letters æ and ø will be discussed before the Common Market in 1992.

The authority to authorize the orthographical forms of names remains with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to which the Place-Name Committee recommends alterations.

The authorized lists Fortegnelse over stednavne i amterna øst for Lillebælt and Fortegnelse over stednavne i amterne vest for Lillebælt have been stored on magnetic tapes and installed on the large computer system of the National Survey and Cadastre/Denmark. This means that it is now possible to compare the authorized names with the names in the National Survey and Cadastre database Stednavneoplysninger (i.e. the names with all available topographic information). The lists are continuously updated, and the lists of corrections are given to the institutions particularly affected by this. For the time being, the Place-name Committee is not planning any new edition of the two lists, but it will be possible to extract lists containing all possible topographic information from the database in the National Survey and Cadastre.

In Denmark all newly published maps observe the UN recommendations and the transliteration system adopted in Montreal 1987.

Toponymic data files of Iceland

The production of a general computerized register of place names is in progress in Iceland.

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